

of the world in his stewardship because I was very impressed by it. And I also was impressed by the fact that he had the courage to start the peace process in Northern Ireland. And I hope and pray, now that the British election is over, that Prime Minister Blair will take up the torch, that the IRA will declare a cease-fire, and that we can get back on the road to resolving that problem. It is high time, and I can tell you, that's what the people of Northern Ireland want.

Thank you.

Note: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks on Departure for Mexico and an Exchange With Reporters

May 5, 1997

The President. Good afternoon. As you all know, I'm about to leave on a weeklong visit to our closest southern neighbors, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. It's the first of three trips I'll take in our hemisphere over the next year. I'd like to say a few words about what I hope to accomplish and why the Americas are so important for our own security and prosperity in the 21st century.

Little more than a decade ago, our neighbors were plagued by civil wars and guerrilla insurgencies, coups and dictators, closed economies and hopeless poverty. Now we face a far different moment, a moment of truly remarkable possibility. Every nation in our hemisphere but one has embraced both free elections and open markets. The region's growing economies have become our largest trading partners. Already we export twice as much to the Americas as to Europe and nearly half again as much as to Asia.

A partnership is emerging between the United States and the Americas based not only on history, geography, and culture but increasingly on shared interest and values and a shared commitment to a common future. More than ever before, we are working with our neighbors on the basis of mutual respect to make a difference on issues that matter most to people in their daily lives, creating good new jobs by opening markets and

spurring growth, improving education to prepare our people to succeed in the global economy, making our water clean and the air clean for our children, facing up to problems we cannot defeat alone like drugs, crime, and corruption.

But while the trend in the Americas is positive, clearly the transition is not complete. If we want citizens to make a lasting commitment to democracy, peace, and open markets, we must support them in gaining confidence that they have made the right choice.

Three years ago, at our historic Summit of the Americas in Miami, the leaders of this hemisphere mapped out a concrete plan to lock in the democratic gains the Americas have made and to see that they work for all of the people. This week we will continue to advance that plan. Together, we can strengthen the institutions of democracy and promote respect for human rights. We can broaden the benefits of open and fair trade. We can shore up the stability of nations that have renounced war. We can combat the drugs and crime and environmental degradation that threaten all our futures. And we can open the doors of education to more so that they can have the skills they need to make the most of their own lives.

It is fitting that this trip should begin in Mexico. We share one of the broadest and deepest relations of any two nations on Earth. Beyond the 2,000-mile border that joins us, beyond the strong bonds of trade that benefit both our people, we must cooperate as never before to find common solutions to common problems.

Our partnerships with Mexico and with the other nations should be the foundation of our own freedom, stability, and prosperity in the 21st century, an engine for economic growth and jobs, a sword in the fight against transnational threats that respect no borders, an example to the world that democracy and open markets actually deliver for those who embrace them. If we continue to shape the future of our hemisphere, the Americas will prosper and so will America.

Thank you.

**Director of Central Intelligence
Nomination**

Q. Mr. President, given the frustrations of what Tony Lake went through for his nomination, are you confident that George Tenet will sail through on his nomination—confirmation process?

The President. I believe he will be confirmed. I sure do.

Flood Aid

Q. Mr. President, while you are gone, the House and Senate are going to take up the legislation regarding the flood aid. Are you still threatening to veto that? Do you still feel a need to, especially with the budget deal?

The President. I have no reason to change the position I adopted.

Q. But people are waiting for that aid.

The President. That's right, and that's why Congress ought to pass it unencumbered.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:21 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House.

**Statement on the Resignation of
Cynthia A. Metzler From the
Department of Labor**

May 5, 1997

From the time she assumed the role of Acting Secretary of Labor in January, Cynthia A. Metzler provided leadership and vision for the 16,000 employees of the Department of Labor. As a result of her unique blend of skills, the Department did not miss a beat in fulfilling its mission for America's working families. As Ms. Metzler departs for the private sector, the Department of Labor is positioned for a smooth and effective transition to Alexis Herman's leadership.

During her tenure as Acting Secretary, Ms. Metzler continued and accelerated the Department's initiatives on behalf of working families. Low wage workers now have better protections as a result of Ms. Metzler's efforts to expand the Department's sweatshop initiative, as well as new initiatives launched in other low wage industries. Ms. Metzler has also assured that workers' pensions are better protected.

In addition, Acting Secretary Metzler kicked off this year's Washington, DC, summer jobs program earlier than any other year. She doubled the number of summer youth the Department will hire, and she led the Department's effort to create more job opportunities for DC residents in furtherance of this administration's DC initiative. She also provided outstanding leadership in our effort to train and employ welfare recipients.

As Cynthia Metzler starts a new chapter in her exceptional career, Hillary and I wish her the very best and thank her for her outstanding service to this administration and to the American people.

**Proclamation 6998—Asian/Pacific
American Heritage Month, 1997**

May 5, 1996

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

Today, almost 10 million Americans can trace their roots to Asia and the Pacific Islands. This month provides a wonderful opportunity to recognize and celebrate all the ways in which Asian and Pacific Americans have enhanced our Nation and strengthened our communities.

North America was visited regularly by Asian and Pacific traders as early as the 16th century, and by the late 1800s, this continent was receiving large numbers of immigrants from China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and the Indian subcontinent. These settlers worked hard, turning wilderness into bountiful farmland in Hawaii, opening new industries in the West, and helping to build the first transcontinental railroad.

Along with a vast array of skills, Americans of Asian and Pacific Island ancestry brought their remarkable traditions of hard work and respect for family and education to their new country. Their belief in the American Dream of equality and opportunity enabled them to face the challenges of adversity and discrimination and achieve a record of distinguished service in all fields, from academia to government, from business to the military, and medicine to the arts. These people and their children managed to preserve the rich legacy